

**Texas Department of Health
Commissioner's Report to the Board of Health
July 13, 2001**

Lab Building. As of May 31, \$0.8 million had been earned on proceeds of the laboratory project revenue bonds, net of estimated arbitrage liabilities. Additional earnings will accumulate until all bond proceeds are spent. It now appears that these additional earnings, plus the \$0.8 million already earned may fall short of the \$1.3 million additional capital authority approved by the Legislative Budget Board in April. The transfer of bond interest from the Texas Public Finance Authority to the General Services Commission (GSC) requires no TDH action. TDH is to transfer \$3.4 million in July to GSC under the current interagency agreement for financing the project. When this transfer is completed, TDH will have satisfied its financing responsibilities on the existing agreement. *For more information contact Al Martin, Financial Services, (512) 458-7111, ext. 6929, e-mail al.martin@tdh.state.tx.us*

Bioterrorism Grant. The Health Alert Network deployment is moving ahead satisfactorily, and implementation of the Texas Department of Health (TDH) regional video conferencing environment is under way. The Institute for Advanced Technology at the University of Texas is funding development of online disease surveillance training software for local health officials with TDH staff consulting on the project. TDH also is working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on a pilot video conferencing function coordinated by CDC. *For more information contact Tom Thornton, Information Services, (512) 458-7271 or e-mail tom.thornton@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Agency Outlook Deployment. Currently, about 2,800 of approximately 4,500 employees have complete Outlook mailboxes; fewer than 200 mailboxes need to be set up in Austin. The Project Team next will focus on deployment to the regional offices by April 2002. *For more information contact Marcy Sprott, Enterprise Systems, (512) 458-7111 ext. 6307 or e-mail marcy.sprott@tdh.state.tx.us.*

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Systems analyst Mary Jane Berry has joined TDH's Enterprise Systems, serving as TDH's HIPAA project manager. Thirteen TDH liaisons will help facilitate communication between HIPAA Project Management and TDH offices. On June 4, more than 200 TDH entities received the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) HIPAA survey, to be returned to the commission by July 15. The survey is to help identify TDH entities affected by HIPAA and is the first step in assessing the overall impact of HIPAA on TDH. Enterprise Systems is collaborating closely with the HHSC HIPAA Project Management Office, Texas Department of Human Services, and Texas Department of Mental Health/Mental Retardation on project activities. Also, the TDH Information Resources Steering Committee is considering benefits of combining the HIPAA project with implementation of Senate Bill 11, which concerns the Privacy of Health Information. Enterprise Systems coordinated with HHSC to assure this strategy is consistent with the commission's approach. *For more information contact Judy Sandberg, Information Systems, (512) 458-7111 ext. 6262 or e-mail judy.sandberg@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Universal Space Workgroup. The Universal Space workgroup has developed a policy and procedure for programs to use in requesting office space in all Austin-area properties, including leased space. The Bureau of Resource Management (BRM) also has implemented a contract with Furniture Marketing Group (FMG) for a space study of certain floors in the Moreton, Tower and Main buildings. Results from the study, which should take about two months to complete, will be used to assign space. First phase of the study was to analyze the “space swapping” project between the Office of Equal Opportunity and Bureau of Human Resources in preparation for developing a consolidated Health and Human Services Employment/Applicant Intake Center on the first floor of the Moreton building. Plans were approved, and the center should be in operation by September 1. *For more information contact John Burlinson, Resource Management, (512) 458-7649 or e-mail john.burlinson@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Tower Building Safety. O'Connell Roberston and Associates, Inc., has completed work on a Life Safety Code survey of the Tower building, and the General Services Commission (GSC) has reviewed their initial report. The survey was initiated by TDH after a fire marshal recommended during an inspection that a sprinkler system be installed. TDH decided to hire a firm to conduct a safety survey to see if other safety measures needed to be taken. BRM will work closely with GSC to recommend the next steps. *For more information contact John Burlinson, Resource Management, (512) 458-7649 or e-mail john.burlinson@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Mold Remediation. BRM finished major emergency mold abatement on Lab Building A-900-1000 and A-500 and conducted initial indoor air tests on request in the Moreton building and minor mold remediation in the Service building. BRM staff, along with Quade Stahl, Chief of the Indoor Air Quality Branch, met with the Employee Advisory Council to address employee concerns. The following items have been submitted to executive management for review and approval: draft policy on treatment of mold contamination; cost estimates and procedures for remediating Tower building mold problems; and contract specifications for weather stripping windows and office remediation. The proposed contract for weather stripping the Tower building has gone to Central Procurement to be sent out for bid. *For more information contact John Burlinson, Resource Management, (512) 458-7649 or e-mail john.burlinson@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Security. Since June 1, security guards have been posted at TDH around the clock. BRM is working on awarding the main contract for security items that will provide a more controlled access and for a security system for the new lab building. *For more information contact John Burlinson, Resource Management, (512) 458-7649 or e-mail john.burlinson@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Hepatitis C. A campaign to heighten public awareness of hepatitis C risk factors, transmission, and prevention began in mid-June. Radio and television spots in English and Spanish featuring Freddy Fender are to air in regions 8 and 11 for about two months. Also, the toll-free, statewide hepatitis information help line (1-866-4HEPABC), featured in the advertisements, is now operating with taped messages on hepatitis A, B, and C in English and Spanish. After listening to recorded messages, callers may choose to speak with someone. As part of the campaign, surveys to assess awareness and knowledge were conducted in both regions. Highlights of the completed Region 8 survey indicate two key findings:

- General awareness of hepatitis is high at 93%, but only 34% are aware of hepatitis C.

- Those aware of hepatitis C have some inaccurate perceptions about causes, vaccines, curability, and transmission.

For more information contact Gary Heseltine, IDEAS, (512) 458-7676 or e-mail gary.heseltine@tdh.state.tx.us.

Anthrax Epizootic. An anthrax epizootic was identified in Val Verde, Uvalde, Real, Kinney, and Edwards counties involving livestock and native and exotic hoof stock. Anthrax is endemic in this area, and a few animal cases can be expected every year with larger, localized epizootics occurring every four to five years. Local health professionals have been sent an advisory about the disease's diagnosis and confirmation. *For more information contact Julie Rawlings, IDEAS, (512) 458-7676 or e-mail julie.rawlings@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Probable Human Cases of Anthrax. Three probable human cases of anthrax have been reported; cultures are pending. If confirmed, these will be the first human cases reported in Texas since 1988, when a Uvalde County man was diagnosed. *For more information contact Jim Schuermann, Zoonosis Control, (512) 458-7255 or e-mail jim.schuermann@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Contaminated Water. Epidemiologists with the Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division (IDEAS) continued investigating a contaminated water situation in Orange County that occurred the last week of April and the first ten days of May. A total of 36 households of people living in the contaminated water areas and 31 households of people living in the uncontaminated areas were interviewed by telephone. Only slightly more people in the contaminated water areas were ill (43%) compared with the number ill in the uncontaminated areas (37%). Both groups had illness rates well above typical background levels. Continuing investigations suggest that many residences might not be in compliance with state laws regarding on-site sewage treatment, which might be contributing to the high background rate of diarrheal illness in the area. *For more information contact Linda Gaul, IDEAS, (512) 458-7676 or e-mail linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Foodborne Illness Outbreak. IDEAS epidemiologists are helping the Region 11 epidemiologist investigate a foodborne illness outbreak that occurred in a prison June 16 and 17. Approximately 500 inmates became ill, none seriously. Food from one meal is being tested for pathogens along with specimens from ill inmates. A survey of about 100 inmates, both ill and well, was conducted; results are pending. *For more information, contact Linda Gaul, IDEAS, (512) 458-7676 or e-mail linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Outbreak of Gastroenteritis. An outbreak of gastroenteritis that resulted in more than 50 people becoming ill with nine hospitalized occurred following a church reunion at a Hill County camp June 23 and 24. IDEAS staff members are assisting Region 8 staff investigate the outbreak. To date, nine people have had specimens test positive for salmonella. *For more information contact Linda Gaul, IDEAS, (512) 458-7676 or e-mail linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Vibrio Vulnificus Cases. IDEAS staff has investigated a few new *Vibrio vulnificus* cases. Summer is the peak season for illness from this infection, which generally occurs in people who are immunocompromised or suffer from liver disease or diabetes and which has about a 50% fatality rate in such cases. The disease is contracted from eating contaminated shellfish that are not fully cooked. Galveston Bay was closed to oyster harvesting until

further notice following flooding in Southeast Texas in early June. *For more information contact Linda Gaul, IDEAS, (512) 458-7676 or e-mail linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us.*

National Tuberculosis (TB) Controllers Association. TB Elimination Division staff attended the National TB Controllers Association meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, with Texas presenting four posters for display. Poster topics included assessment of the financial impact of potential language needs of Texas TB patients, targeted tuberculin testing and treatment in a rural Texas county, development of local epidemiological profiles of foreign-born populations for targeted TB prevention and control activities, and development of a computer-based method of targeting high-risk communities for testing and treating latent TB infection. *For more information contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination, (512) 458-7447 or e-mail charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Arthritis Grant Proposal. A grant proposal was submitted to CDC for development of a state plan to address arthritis, the leading cause of disability in the United States. Collaborations with Texas chapters of the four arthritis foundations were instrumental in developing the proposal. *For more information contact Jennifer Smith, Cardiovascular Health and Wellness, (512) 458-7670 or e-mail jennifer.smith@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Pediatric Diabetes Research Advisory Committee. A Pediatric Diabetes Research Advisory Committee was established by the 77th Legislature to develop a plan to research childhood-onset diabetes and its associated conditions. The committee also will assess the resources and talents of Texas institutions as possible research sites and make recommendations to the Governor and legislature by December 2002 concerning research programs and required funding. The Texas Diabetes Council will recommend qualified people to the Commissioner of Health, who will appoint fifteen committee members. *For more information contact Jan Ozias, Texas Diabetes/Council Program, (512) 458-7490 or e-mail jan.ozias@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Suicide Prevention Forum. In May, TDH helped plan and participated in a statewide forum on suicide prevention. More than 100 people from throughout the state came to Austin to address this serious public health problem. This forum was the first step toward developing a statewide strategic plan on reducing Texas suicides. *For more information contact David Zane, Injury Epidemiology and Surveillance Program, (512) 458-7266 or e-mail david.zane@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Cancer Incidence Reporting Act. SB 285, which amends the Cancer Incidence Reporting Act to require reporting of cancer cases by health care practitioners, was approved by the House and Senate and signed by the Governor. Beginning with 2002, physicians must report cases of cancer solely diagnosed or treated in their offices. *For more information contact Nancy Weiss, Cancer Registry, (512) 458-7523 or e-mail nancy.weiss@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Anencephaly. Surveillance staff from the Texas Birth Defects Monitoring Division (TBDMD) recently detected seven cases of anencephaly in late 2000 and early 2001 among births to mothers residing in Laredo. These seven cases represent a rate of 26.7 cases per 10,000 live births. This rate is higher than the average rate previously reported by the Texas Neural Tube Defect (NTD) Project for births in the 14 Texas counties bordering Mexico from 1993 to 1998 (6.2 per 10,000), and this elevated rate is statistically significant. There is no concentration of cases in a particular month of conception. Further, there is no

evidence of a clustering of cases in a particular neighborhood, according to addresses at delivery provided in medical records. TDH and Laredo public health officials are continuing to investigate this cluster, including addresses of case mothers near the time of conception. In 1993 and 1997 in Webb County, the rates were 14.8 cases and 19.5 cases per 10,000 live births, respectively. In addition to continued surveillance, TBDMD is working with Region 11 staff, the City of Laredo, and others to pursue strategies to decrease the rate of NTDs, including anencephaly and spina bifida. *For more information contact Mark Canfield, Birth Defects Monitoring, (512) 458-7232 or e-mail mark.canfield@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Syphilis. HIV/STD Epidemiology Division staff members have been analyzing syphilis data to characterize what appears to be excess syphilis morbidity, especially among gay men in Houston. Recent men who have sex with men (MSM) cases of primary, secondary, and early latent syphilis are double a similar time period last year. The Houston STD Program has initiated enhanced surveillance for syphilis, provided media alerts in the gay press and to physicians, and intensified prevention efforts aimed at gay men. Also, discussion of the excess morbidity became a part of a previously planned three-day meeting in Austin of TDH staff and contractors handling syphilis elimination funds, including Houston representatives. Surveillance data was provided in several forms including the central office STD*MIS database, the Houston STD*MIS database, and data entered from hard copy aggregate tables sent to the Central Office Syphilis Elimination Project Manager by the Houston STD Program. *For more information contact Rose Brownridge, HIV/STD Prevention, (512) 490-2505 or e-mail rose.brownridge@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Congressional Black Caucus Funds. TDH staff is developing a plan to use Congressional Black Caucus funds directed to the Bureau of HIV/STD Prevention to focus efforts on linking incarcerated HIV-positive people, the majority of whom are African American and Hispanic, with primary and secondary prevention efforts. This plan includes significant activities to increase access to HIV medications distributed through the Texas HIV Medication Program and with adherence to the complex HIV medication regimes. *For more information contact Rose Brownridge, HIV/STD Prevention, (512) 490-2505 or e-mail rose.brownridge@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Newborn Screening Specimens. In April, the Newborn Screening laboratory analyzed 55,744 specimens with 278,720 tests performed to complete the battery of screening for five disorders on each specimen. The Newborn Screening laboratory continues to experience many problems with old equipment. For most of May, only three of the six gamma counter instruments functioned. Results continue to go out on schedule with the use of temporary employees and additional hours for full-time employees. The Newborn Screening laboratory "Invitation for Bid" for upgrading laboratory technology was advertised on the Texas marketplace with a GSC bid opening date of May 29. TDH Laboratory and Central Procurement staff reviewed and evaluated bids the end of June to determine the vendor that would meet the "Best Value Criteria". *For more information contact Eldridge T. Hutcherson, Biochemistry and Genetics, (512) 458-7430 or e-mail eldridge.hutcherson@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Pertussis-Related Death. Another pertussis-related death has been reported, bringing the total to four in Texas this year. The one-month-old infant from Dallas County died May 26. Although the pertussis culture was negative, the specimen was not collected until one month after onset; and the infant had classic symptoms of paroxysmal cough, inspiratory whoop, post-tussive vomiting, and cyanosis after paroxysm. He had a positive chest x-ray and culture-confirmed adenovirus. Other pertussis deaths reported this year include a six-week-old Palo Pinto County female who died April 23; a two-month-old Midland County female who died February 15; and a Dallas County 24-day-old female who died February 9. All the infants were too young to receive pertussis vaccine before infection. *For more information contact Laura Tabony or Jan Pelosi, Immunization Division, (512) 458-7284, or e-mail laura.tabony@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Pertussis Outbreak in School-aged Children. A pertussis outbreak in school-aged children has occurred in Midland County. The index case began coughing April 23 and was diagnosed May 18. The initial investigation of close contacts at the public charter school the student attended revealed ten other students in the fifth and sixth grades who were symptomatic for pertussis. As symptomatic students in other classes and grade levels were identified, the recommendation was made to prophylaxis all students at the charter school and close contacts of any symptomatic students. Special clinic days were held at the health department for testing symptomatic contacts and dispensing erythromycin to those exposed. Case investigations revealed a possible link to a Midland infant who died in February. Altogether 114 persons in Midland have had symptoms of acute cough onset with or without other symptoms of pertussis. The Midland Health Department has treated 650 close contacts of symptomatic people, which includes about half the charter school student population. Publicity about the outbreak resulted in identification of other probable cases in the Midland, Monahans, Wickett, and Odessa communities. The TDH Region 9 sub-office in Midland identified 23 symptomatic residents of Ward County (Monahans and Wickett) and treated 205. *For more information contact Laura Tabony or Jan Pelosi, Immunization Division, (512) 458-7284, or e-mail laura.tabony@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Male Involvement in Texas. Three new Male Involvement projects are expected to be in operation this summer in the Rio Grande Valley, El Paso, and San Antonio. Existing Male Involvement projects in Austin and Houston are preparing Request For Applications for years four and five funding extensions. The TDH Male Involvement Program is co-sponsoring regional development training events in Dallas and Amarillo this summer to “create an infrastructure to support and foster the formation and development of local Male Involvement Teen Pregnancy Prevention Coalitions.” *For more information contact Alex Fisher, Women’s Health, (512) 458-7111 x2141 or e-mail alex.fisher@tdh.state.tx.us.*

School-Based Health Center Funding. Four school-based health centers (SBHC) funded in January will receive continued funding at 75%. Three new SBHCs will receive start-up funding in FY 02, beginning September 1. *For more information contact Michelle McComb, School Health, (512) 458-7111 x3307, or e-mail michelle.mccomb@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Eligible Women, Infants and Children. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a Washington-based nonprofit advocacy organization, and the National Association of WIC Directors (NAWD) released an analysis showing the number of eligible women, infants and children who would be turned away from the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) in each state under the approved U.S. Congress Agriculture Sub-committee appropriations bill. Estimates show that Texas would have the second largest shortfall of funds at \$9,364,872. That translates to an estimated 20,120 clients the state would not be able to serve. The analysis states that \$110 million more than is currently in the Administration's budget is needed for WIC to meet the Center's and NAWD's estimate of the number of WIC clients who will seek services in FY 2002. WIC participation nationwide has already risen in FY 2001 above the Administration's estimates for FY 2002. This, coupled with rising unemployment, could mean trouble for the WIC Program if appropriations are not increased. The full house was to take up this item June 27, but the WIC Program has not yet been able to determine the outcome. *For more information contact Gerald Cannaday, Nutrition Services, (512) 458-7111, ext. 3408 or email gerald.cannaday@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 2/3

Rabies. Region 2/3 had 40 new cases of animals infected with rabies in May: 35 skunks, three cats, one dog and one bat. The 2001 total for the region, as of June 11, is 300 positive rabies cases. Tarrant County has the largest number of rabies infected animals in the state with 68 cases. Ellis County is second with 55 cases, and Denton County is third with 37 cases. Zoonosis Control has been busy training animal control officers and with rabies presentations. *For more information contact Connie Lindley, Public Health Region 2/3, (817) 264-4921, or e-mail connie.lindley@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Epidemiology Training. On June 7 and 8, TDH Region 2/3 personnel participated in the first Basic Epidemiology seminar for local health departments. The seminar is intended to teach local health authorities, personnel at local health departments and TDH regional staff epidemiology skills and communicable disease surveillance. After an initial evaluation, the course will be offered quarterly throughout the state. *For more information contact Brad Walsh, Public Health Region 2/3, (817) 264-4551, or e-mail brad.walsh@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 4/5 North

West Nile Virus. On May 23, the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and CDC produced a Grand Rounds satellite broadcast called "Preparing for West Nile Virus: Will Your Community Be Next?" James Wright, D.V.M., Region 4/5 North Regional Zoonosis Control Veterinarian, served as a panel member. During his presentation, Dr. Wright commented on surveillance plans, resource concerns, and the infrastructure available to detect and respond to a case or outbreak of West Nile Virus in Texas. *For more information contact James Wright, Public Health Region 4/5 North, (903) 533-5243 or e-mail at james.wright@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 6/5 South

Flooding. In response to the devastating flooding from Tropical Storm Allison in Houston and Southeast Texas, TDH regional staff worked with local health departments and other agencies to provide assistance to those involved in the relief effort. Regional staff represented public health agencies at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Disaster Field Office, answered questions about flood cleanup, tetanus shots, and other health concerns. *For more information contact Greta Etnyre, Public Health Region 6/5 South, (713) 767-3022, or e-mail greta.etnyre@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Flood-Damaged Hospitals. The Regional Health Facility Licensing and Compliance program (HFLC) worked with state and federal authorities to evaluate Houston-area hospitals after flooding caused extensive damage to the Texas Medical Center. HFLC staff accompanied Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and FEMA officials on inspections of hospitals affected by flooding. They also advised hospitals on the necessary steps needed to change hospital bed designations so hospitals could better utilize their resources during this time of limited patient capacity. *For more information contact Kathy Johnson, Public Health Region 6/5 South, (713) 767-3340, or e-mail kathy.johnson@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Needs Assessment. The Houston Department of Health and Human Services conducted a rapid needs assessment after Tropical Storm Allison on June 16. Dr. Huai Lin, regional epidemiologist, along with nine other TDH colleagues from Austin, participated in the study. The assessment was to rapidly assess the health and needs of communities after the flooding. In addition, data will be used for emergency planning by the City of Houston. *For more information, contact Huai Lin, Public Health Region 6/5 South, (713) 767-3232 or e-mail huai.lin@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Pesticide Applicator Program. In the aftermath of Tropical Storm Allison, the regional Pesticide Applicator Program provided technical assistance to mosquito control districts and local jurisdictions on vector control issues. While no mosquitoes carrying the St. Louis encephalitis virus have been identified, the problem was classified as serious enough to disrupt work and other activities because of the tremendous number of mosquitoes. Regional TDH staff along with the program's entomologist, FEMA and CDC personnel developed vector control guidelines for FEMA funding of pesticide applications. It was only the third time FEMA has offered funds to combat mosquitoes. The regional TDH staff continues to monitor certified pesticide applicator activities. *For more information contact Barbara Key, Public Health Region 6/5 South, (713) 767-3251, or e-mail barbara.key@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Product Safety Program. As a result of a complaint filed with the regional Product Safety Program, an investigation was conducted at a toy warehouse in northeast Houston that experienced significant flooding. The Product Safety investigator determined that more than 70,000 stuffed animals had been contaminated with flood water. Initially, the owner wanted to ship the damaged products out of the country, but after further discussions the owner agreed to dispose of the products. The regional investigator witnessed the disposal of the flood-contaminated stuffed animals so they would not enter the market place. *For more information please contact Barbara Key, Public Health Region 6/5 South, (713) 767-3251, or e-mail barbara.key@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 7

Public Health Nurse. Region 7's Public Health Nurse in Washington County assisted in the successful application for a \$50,000 grant from the St. Luke's Episcopal Health Charities of Houston. This grant will enable Washington County to form a Medical Assistance Program to provide prescriptions for low income and medically underserved residents of the county. The Public Health Nurse is a charter member of the board that will manage the grant funds. This effort has been supported by the medical and faith communities in Washington County and will be modeled after similar programs in other areas of Texas and Florida. *For more information contact Phyllis Stone, Public Health Region 7, (254) 778-6744, or e-mail phyllis.stone@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Provider Relations Representatives. Region 7 has four Provider Relations Representatives that provide training, education, and technical assistance to more than 600 Texas Health Steps Medical and Dental Providers in the 30-county regional area. In January the region implemented provider relation services. The goal is to assure that all providers in Region 7 receive accurate, current, and consistent information from the agencies and health care systems that assist them in serving Medicaid-eligible Texans. *For more information contact Eileen Walker, Public Health Region 7, (254) 778-6744, or e-mail eileen.walker@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 9/10

Environmental Stakeholder Meetings. Region 9/10 Border Health staff coordinated environmental stakeholder agency meetings for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with the Mayor of El Paso representing the community. EPA told stakeholders they will conduct heavy metal soil testing to evaluate possible arsenic/lead contamination in communities surrounding an old industrial site. The meetings helped secure soil sampling permits with key community agencies. *For more information contact Miguel Escobedo, Public Health Region 9/10, (915) 834-7680 or e-mail miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Anti-smoking Ordinance. The City of El Paso approved an anti-smoking ordinance in restaurants, bars, and other public places. The ordinance is intended to prevent second-hand tobacco exposure among nonsmokers. Regional and local public health staff provided information on the health effects of environmental tobacco smoke exposure, which helped the city's elected officials understand the dangers. *For more information contact Miguel Escobedo, Public Health Region 9/10, (915) 834-7680 or e-mail miguel.escobedo@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 11

Sharp's Safety Conference. On May 17 and 18 the TDH Sharp's Safety Committee held a conference attended by representatives from all regions as well as the Bureau of Laboratories, HIV/STD Prevention Bureau, Immunizations Division, and South Texas Healthcare Center. Eight companies demonstrated safety syringes, needleless systems,

blood collection equipment, lancets, and capillary tubes. A standardized rating sheet was used to evaluate and score each product. The highest rated products will be tried during the next two months, after which time the committee will recommend purchases. Costs for syringes and needles or needleless systems will increase at least three-fold, though savings will be achieved in worker's compensation claims. *For more information contact Melissa Davis, Public Health Region 11, (956) 423-0130, or e-mail melissaa.davis@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Binational Conference. On May 25, TDH staff participated in a binational conference in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, sponsored by the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Association (USMBHA)/Sister Cities. Others in attendance included staff from the UT-Brownsville School of Public Health, Texas A&M School of Rural Public Health, and Texas A&M Agricultural Extension. TDH staff presented on program activities, client profiles, services provided, and statistical information to complement presentations conducted by counterparts in the Mexican public health system. A variety of initiatives were proposed, including establishing workgroups and action plans for developing standards for confidentiality in the exchange of cross-border cases and expanding Tamaulipas' congenital syphilis prevention campaign to include sister cities in Texas. *For more information contact Paul Topete, Public Health Region 11, (956) 423-0130, or e-mail paul.topete@tdh.state.tx.us.*

59th Annual U.S.-Mexico Border Health Association Meeting. Region 11 Director and Program Managers for the Border Health and Birth Defects programs attended the 59th Annual U.S.-Mexico Border Health Association meeting May 29 through June 1. The Border Health program presented information on Operation Lone Star; a project through which, for three years, regional staff has coordinated primary, dental, and health promotion activities with military personnel targeting colonia residents in Hidalgo County. The Birth Defects Monitoring Division Program Manager provided an update on the NTD cluster in Webb County and participated in the discussions on the NTD binational effort for the Texas-Mexico border. *For more information contact Brian Smith, Public Health Region 11, (956) 423-0130, or e-mail brian.smith@tdh.state.tx.us.*